

SEPTEMBER 6, 1964

A Most Heroic Leap

"I was like a bird in a cage. I had to get out—I was struggling to get free."

—OKSANA KASENKINA, New York City, 1948

A tan-uniformed employee rushed from the exclusive 28 Club, next door to the Russian Consulate on 61st Street in Manhattan, and shouted: "There's a woman lying in the courtyard back there!"

The shout sent reporters and policemen pelting into the 28 Club and out the back door, where they found three Russians frantically trying to drag a plump woman into the consulate. But they were too late. Oksana Kasenkina had made her leap to freedom.

Thousands have fled Communism since that August day in 1948, but few have matched the near-suicidal daring of this lonely middle-aged schoolteacher, whose off-again on-again escape dramatized to the whole world the true nature of Russian totalitarianism.

The wife of an ex-Tsarist officer who had been persecuted and eventually liquidated by the Communists, Oksana Kasenkina nevertheless had the deep emotional attachment to her motherland which has made so many other Russians tolerate Communism. But when her son was lost in a suicidal attack personally ordered by Stalin to relieve the siege of Leningrad, her bitterness deepened. Then an influential friend wangled her a job teaching biology to Soviet children in New York.



Praying she could catch hold of the telephone cables, Oksana jumped